Overview of Student Learning Assessment Plans

The success of academic programs – all degrees, all certificates and certain student support programs- is measured through the use of student learning outcomes.

*Simply stated, a student learning outcome should indicate what a student will be able to do at the end of a program of study that she or he couldn’t do at the beginning of that program of study. It is the knowledge, skills, and abilities that a student has attained at the end (or as a result) of his or her engagement in a particular set of higher education experiences. It should not describe a process.*

Student learning outcomes must also be very specific, measurable, and indicate whose attainment can be assessed after undertaking a set of education experiences. While student learning assessments may take place within a course, it is the educational program that is the focus of assessment.

FSU has over 1250 student learning outcomes that are measured annually. Other than providing valuable information to faculty, these reviews satisfy two assessment requirements.

- They are used in our responses toward university-wide accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools—Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)
- They are used in State Mandated Academic Learning Compacts (SMALCs) to comply with the requirement for student learning outcomes for all bachelor’s degrees from the Florida Board of Governors (BOG).

We submit a report to the BOG annually and to SACSCOC every five years. For SACSCOC, we provide two years of complete assessment data.

The assessment process is easily summarized in 4 questions:

1. What do you want? (outcome)
2. How will you measure progress? (assessment)
3. What happened? (results)
4. How do you improve or sustain performance? (improvement plan)

Information from all over campus is stored in the university’s Institutional Effectiveness Portal.

Its link is [http://iep.fsu.edu](http://iep.fsu.edu).

This link directs you to the software system that maintains information on university assessment. It was developed and is supported by Nuventive Improvement Platform. The IE portal includes information on both Student Learning Outcomes and Program Outcomes in conformance with university policy.

Program outcomes or the consequences of the program are only tangentially addressed in this overview. Program outcomes are required for the SACSCOC 10th year review.
Guide to Student Learning Outcomes (SLO)

The identification and development of student learning outcomes is the first step in our assessment process. The following explains in detail what we do to comply with regional accreditation and BOG requirements and then lays out the remaining steps in completing an assessment plan.

Writing a student learning outcome

- What, specific behaviors or skills do you wish to assess?

The definition of a student learning outcome should include the following:

- **Who** is responsible for conducting the activities you include in your outcome;
- **What** specifically will be the measurable results of your activities;
- **When** do you expect the attainment of your outcome; and
- **Where** will the program activities occur which will assist you in meeting your outcome, or **How**.

**Example #1:**

Upon completion of the program of instruction, the student will be able to distinguish among different types of quasi-experimental design.

**When:** Upon completion of the course of instruction.

**Who:** The student.

**How:** Demonstrate competency in basic quasi-experimental research design

**Where:** This assessment will be accomplished in a specific course embedded exercise completed in specific course XXXX administered at specific location (e.g. FSU branch campus) or by a specific type of delivery (online/face-to-face). If a specific course is not identified here, it should be in the “assessment and evaluation process” section.

What comprises a good assessment?

- How do you know that progress is or is not being made?
- Let’s be clear, student grades are explicitly not an acceptable part of a good assessment plan

In order to meet expectations by accrediting bodies and usefulness for faculty, it is necessary to clearly state how you will assess progress in meeting student learning and program outcomes. It is necessary to record precisely what you will measure to establish performance, how the information will be collected, from whom it will be gathered, when it will be collected, and who will be responsible for collecting the information. It must also state the specific expectation or level of performance (standard) that the program has for establishing that the student learning has been successful. These standards are the point of comparison against which the actual evidence of student learning will be judged once it is collected.
In your most skeptical mood, what sort of evidence would convince you that progress is being made toward the goal?

The assessment and evaluation process statement identifies the:

- **Specific behaviors** you are looking for as evidence of the learning outcome and indicate what information you will seek;
- **Standard or criterion** against which the outcome will be judged successful;
- **Measure and method** by which the assessment will occur;
- **Validity** of the measure and method used in the assessment;
- **Time frame** indicates when the assessment will occur;
- **Responsibility** indicates who is to conduct or store the assessment; and
- **Conditions** in which the assessment will occur and the reasons why the specific conditions were chosen.

In writing a student learning outcome, it is often useful to begin with an action verb that describes the types of learning expected. General verbs such as understand, experience, comprehend, or recognize do not work well because they are difficult to measure. Bloom’s taxonomy is a good place to find verbs that work well (see appendix). Long and compound statements of learning outcomes should also be avoided because they too are difficult to measure and are often imprecise. Specific statements are generally better. The type of outcome and assessment method will be requested in the Nuventive System by a drop down box; this information is tied to state requirements regarding academic learning compacts.

Student Learning Outcomes often remain the same from year-to-year. The Nuventive system continues a SLO from one year to the next, but differ in that the year being considered is changed and the standard or criterion of acceptable results may be updated. Outdated or superseded SLOs are archived in the Nuventive system.

**Example #2:**

This will result in 85% of the students scoring 70% or better as determined by the departmental exam in EXP 3000, Approaches to the Study of Behavior, which is required of all psychology majors. By learning about research methods and design in psychology, students will be able to read the literature and thereby keep up with an ever-changing knowledge base. By learning about how data are gathered, analyzed, and interpreted in psychology, students will be able to become active participants in research.

All students enrolled in EXP 3000 will be given a multiple choice exam at the end of the semester to assess their knowledge of research design and analysis. The exam will be constructed by faculty who teach EXP 3000 at the Tallahassee campus and reviewed by the Associate Chair and Director of Undergraduate Studies. Each semester, a standard item analysis will be conducted to identify individual items that need to be replaced and/or reworded.

**Specific Behaviors:** Demonstrate competency in basic research design and analysis.

**Standard or criterion:** This will result in 85% of the students scoring 70% or better.
Measure and Assessment Method: As determined by departmental exam.

Validity: The exam will be constructed by faculty who teach EXP 3000 and reviewed by the Associate Chair and Director of Undergraduate Studies. Each semester, a standard item analysis will be conducted to identify individual items that need to be replaced and/or rewarded.

Time Frame: At the end of the semester.

Responsibility: Faculty.

Conditions: All students enrolled in EXP 3000 will be given a multiple choice exam at the end of the semester to assess their knowledge of research design and analysis. EXP 3000, Approaches to the Study of Behavior, is required of all psychology majors.

Writing a Results and Analysis Statement

The results statement is updated annually. It appears in the Results section of the Nuventive Unit Assessment.

*The importance of analysis in the institutional effectiveness process cannot be overstated. Please remember that your results should inform decisions that lead to continuous improvement of your program. It forms the link between your data and your improvement plan and must lead the reader from one to the other.*

- Did you or did you not make progress toward your goal?

The results statement should contain enough detail to corroborate your assessment. It is not enough to collect information. It must also be analyzed. In particular, it must be considered against the standards you have set. Analysis should be used to identify ways in which performance could be improved.

Generally, your analysis should state its most valuable finding. It should attempt to explain any deviation from the established standards. It might also report other insights that you have uncovered. It should indicate how such findings might or will be used in making improvements or how it leads to further analysis. It may want to highlight areas of success in addition to areas needing improvement. Importantly, you must not forget to provide some evaluation of the method you used and its continuing status as a tool for assessment of outcomes.

The results statement should address the following requirements:

- Results should be summarized and related to the content of the outcome;
- Relationship to Standard should be specifically noted;
- Analysis includes more than reporting of results. It should include the results of internal discussions or investigations regarding the data and which changes could be made to improve the program;
- Deviation from Standard clearly indicates to the reader or reviewer whether or not the standard was met;
• **Responsibility** for collection of the data at the correct time from all data sources;
• **Insights Uncovered** include findings from the analysis of your data and will likely be your most significant finding; and
• **Evaluation of assessment method** to ensure it is providing the information needed.
• An indication (of yes or no in a drop down box) of whether the improvement plan will have a budget impact

The related documents field associated with each outcome in the IE portal allows you to upload copies of the assessments you used, including examination items, rubrics, and judging criteria. It also lets you store copies of results and analyses that you perform. This documentation is required by accrediting bodies. We encourage you to include information into the repository if the information or analysis is available and provide additional pertinent information.

**Considerations of privacy**

Under state and federal law, the information that can be legally included in the portal is rigorously restricted. Federal and state privacy laws protect student educational records. A university found in violation is subject to severe penalties, including the loss of federal funding. **You must be exceptionally careful about the information you submit for entry into the Institutional Effectiveness Portal.**

**When in doubt, do not enter or upload information that provides information on specific students.**

**Example #3:**

The departmental exam was administered to all sections (3) of EXP 3000 on the main campus at the end of the fall semester. Results indicated that a mean of 69% (62%, 66%, 78% per section) of the students scored 70% or better on the 17 item exam. An item analysis of the exam questions were conducted and it was found that one question had a significant flaw and that there were problems with several others. The exam was modified, i.e., 3 questions were replaced, 2 questions were reworded, and 3 new questions were added. The 20 question exam was then administered to two of the three sections of EXP 3000 at the end of the spring semester. One section did not administer the exam because of a miscommunication with the instructor. Across both sections, 92.5% of the students (88% and 97% in the individual sections) scored 70% or better on the exam.

**Results:** A mean of 69% (62%, 66%, 78% per section) of the students scored 70% or better on the 17 item exam.

**Relationship to Standard:** 69% (as compared to the standard of 85%)

**Analysis:** A statistical item analysis of the exam questions was conducted to determine if demographic factors such as gender or ethnicity were significant and should shape future instruction. No significant differences were discovered.

**Deviation from Standard:** One question had a significant flaw and that there were problems with several others.
Responsibility: Faculty teaching the course.

Insights covered: The exam was modified, i.e., 3 questions were replaced, 2 questions were reworded, and 3 new questions were added.

Evaluation of assessment method: An item analysis and expert review.

Location: Where and how the program is being delivered – main campus, branch campus, online or face-to-face. Separate information must be collected and reported on each campus and delivery mode. The entire plan is incomplete is the separate information is not reported in the Results section.

Writing an Improvement Plan

What must be present in an acceptable improvements plan description?

This is also updated annually based upon the analysis of results. It appears in the Improvement Plan section of the Nuventive Unit Assessment.

The Improvement Plan answers the question:

- What are you going to do to improve learning in the program? Alternately, what are you going to do to keep your department or program operating at its high level? Who is responsible?
- It is not sufficient to report that “no improvements are needed and that monitoring will be done.” If no improvements are needed, what will be done to sustain performance and specifically what happens under a regime of monitoring?

The results and analysis statement should spur some action to continue improvement. Such improvements might include the need to make changes in the student learning outcomes. More typically, they will include changes ranging from curricula refinements to proposed new educational tracks to enhancements in support services. They may also require new or modified assessment practices or special attention by the program faculty.

Please remember if your program or students are already performing at a high level, you should state how you expect to retain that level of performance. Your statements will provide a record over time of your efforts to improve the learning experiences of students and programs. They should be documented carefully and fully. Our record of institutional effectiveness efforts for SACSCOC must show continuous improvement. If your prospective improvements or action plan requires additional resources, their potential budget impact should be noted.

- Improvement envisioned should be specifically stated;
- Time Frame should be indicated within which the improvement will be implemented;
- Responsibility will identify who should ensure implementation or planning for the improvement is complete (or on schedule);
- Actions to retain results are required even if you are already performing at a high level;
- Resources should be identified if necessary; and
• Budgetary Implications should be noted if warranted.

Example #4:

The goal was not met in the fall. This appears to be due to the content validity of several questions on the exam. We replaced these items in the spring, resulting in the goal being met. However, the exam was administered to only two of the three sections, so that we did not assess 100% of the population. The Undergraduate Studies Committee and faculty who teach this course will review the exam early in the Fall 2018 semester to evaluate the validity of the exam and where it continues to assess the most important elements of knowledge we wish students to attain. The exam will be revised as necessary and administered to all sections of this course (we will make sure there is no miscommunication with instructors and that they all understand the importance of administering the exam to their students).

Improvement envisioned: Review the exam to evaluate the exam and whether it continues to assess the most important elements of the knowledge we wish students to attain.

Time Frame: Early in the Fall 2018 semester.

Responsibility: The undergraduate Studies Committee and faculty who teach this course.

Actions to retain results: None noted.

Resources: None noted.

Once completed, these submissions are reviewed by the person entering the information, the Department Chair, the Dean or designee and, in a few instances, the Provost’s Office.
Institutional Effectiveness (IE) Review Suggested Questions

This rubric is suggested for Academic Deans, Curriculum Committees and Vice Presidents

Each assessment unit has a mission statement that typically remains unchanged from year to year. The current unit mission statement associated with the program is in the Nuventive IE portal.

**Evaluating the Mission Statement: Colleges and Vice Presidents**

1. Does your mission statement orient everyone in the university about your direction and contribution to the furtherance of the university’s mission statement?
2. Does the mission statement provide the scope of your college's or program’s activities within the university?
3. Does the mission statement include what makes the program unique and necessary to the university?
4. Is the mission statement sufficiently brief to allow for its communication easily?
5. Does the mission statement logically lead the reader to the subsequent outcomes for your departments or programs?
6. Does the mission statement provide a sense of the change your college hopes to accomplish and the conditions it hopes to improve?

**Student Learning Outcomes**

**Evaluating the Outcome Statement:**

1. Are you satisfied with the way in which the outcome is stated?
2. Is the outcome clearly related to the mission of the degree or certificate program?
3. Has responsibility for the outcome been assigned correctly?
4. Is this outcome significant enough to warrant the time, energy and commitment needed for continued assessment?
5. Is the outcome core to the degree or certificate program?
6. Has the outcome been agreed upon by the appropriate set of faculty in accordance with the norms of the discipline and criterion-related validity?

For SMALCs only (baccalaureate degrees)

7. Has the outcome been categorized (as communication, critical thinking, or content) correctly?

**Program Outcomes**

**Evaluating the Outcome Statement:**

1. Are you satisfied with the way in which the outcome is stated?
2. Is the outcome clearly related to the mission of the program?
3. Has responsibility for the outcome been assigned correctly?
4. Is this outcome significant enough to warrant the time, energy and commitment needed for continued assessment?
5. Is the outcome core to the program?
6. Has the outcome been agreed upon by the appropriate set of faculty?
7. Does the outcome specify the year for which it will be assessed?

Student Learning Outcomes

Evaluating the Assessment Statement:

1. Does the specific indicator measured in the assessment capture the outcome adequately?
2. Is the standard set appropriately and at the right level?
3. Is the assessment method feasible?
4. Has the time frame for accomplishing the outcome been set appropriately?
5. Has the assessment method been reviewed and recommended by faculty?

For SMALCs only (baccalaureate degrees)
6. Can the validity of the assessment measurement be corroborated by internal or external means?

Program Outcomes

Evaluating the Assessment Statement:

1. Does the specific indicator measured in the assessment capture the outcome adequately?
2. Is the standard set appropriately and at the right level?
3. Is the assessment method feasible?
4. Will the assessment method yield valid measurements?
5. Has the time frame for accomplishing the outcome been set appropriately?
6. Has the assessment method been reviewed and recommended by faculty?
## Student Learning Outcomes and Program Outcomes

### Evaluating the Results and Analysis Statement:

1. Are the results stated clearly?
2. Are the results summarized in a fair and representative fashion?
3. Is it clear how the results compare to the standards set in the assessment statement?
4. Is the significance of the deviation from the standard evaluated appropriately?
5. Is there some analysis of the results?
6. Does the analysis consider all the concerns raised by the results and provide a basis upon which an improvement plan can be developed?
7. Does the analysis avoid the use of student grades?
8. Is the evaluation method satisfactory?
9. Have separate sets of results been reported for each location and mode of delivery?

### Evaluating the Improvements Made and Action Plan Statement:

1. Do the results and analysis support the recommended improvements?
2. Is the recommended improvement or action plan feasible?
3. Is the timetable outlined in the recommendation acceptable?
4. Have any unintended or adverse consequences of the plan been identified?
5. Will the recommended improvements help ensure continuous improvement of the program?
6. Have budgetary implications been identified?
7. Has responsibility for the improvements been assigned correctly?
8. Do the budget recommendations merit further attention and forwarding?
9. Do the results merit greater attention than called for in the improvement or plan?


**Academic Learning Compacts**

**Who mandated academic learning compacts and who will enforce them?**

The state Board of Governors mandated academic learning compacts be identified and used within each bachelor’s degree offered by each university in the SUS.

The compacts are part of the accountability system developed by the Board of Governors. The system contains information on several aspects of university performance and be available on the Board web page. Universities submit information for inclusion in the accountability system, according to Board guidelines, annually.

The Board allows each university to define its own policies in the implementation of the compacts. Universities are expected to oversee their own policies. The university will use its existing institutional effectiveness approval process to review and approve the compacts. The Board has not indicated how it will enforce compliance with university or state policy, although its authority in this area is broad and there is an audit of the report submitted to the BOG.

**What exactly is being required of the faculty, students and university?**

The state wants universities to certify that each baccalaureate graduate has completed a program with clearly stated core learning expectations in critical thinking, communication, and discipline and content knowledge and skills. The faculty is supposed to identify the expected core learning outcomes that will be attained by graduates of each baccalaureate program. These outcomes must then be communicated to students. In order to ensure graduates have met the expectations of each compact, each program is expected to develop and deploy assessment mechanisms that determine how well student learning matches stated expectations. The assessments of student performance must be corroborated through evaluation methods that are periodically reviewed to validate the accuracy of the assessment methods. These assessment methods will also be reviewed in the required state seven year program review. The results of the assessments are to be used to improve student performance and program effectiveness. The university must report annually on the results of the academic learning compacts.

**Why do we have a “policy” separate from the “guidelines”?**

A separate “policy” and set of “guidelines” provide the faculty and administration more flexibility in responding to the state mandate than would a single policy. Each university Board of Trustees must approve policies governing the state mandated academic learning compacts. These policies are also subject to review by the Board of Governors for consistency with state guidelines. University guidelines can be approved by the Faculty Senate and Administration with reference to either the Board of Trustees or Board of Governors.

A prospective policy change would require review and approval at two levels outside the typical administrative process on campus. As a consequence, a single policy document would be
difficult to change, lock the faculty and administration into decisions for longer periods, and be subject to more state oversight than two separate documents.

**How will the compacts affect my work in the classroom?**

The compacts require agreement by faculty within a program about what the outcomes of the program are to be and how progress in attaining these results is to be measured and assessed. For most programs, this will mean little change in classroom activities since curriculum committees typically have this role. However, it will require faculty to document and report results on specific assessments, as decided within each program.

**How will the compacts affect degree programs?**

Compacts should not affect most degree programs. Programs that have course requirements that can be associated with learning outcomes can comply without difficulty. Programs where course requirements do not allow easy association will have to construct means to ensure that every graduate has completed a program that has those core learning outcomes. This can be done through methods such a required examination, a capstone experience, specific requirements such as portfolios or essays, or structured sampling.

**Will my department have the opportunity to revise the outcomes it measures?**

Yes, annually in the fall.

**What does validation of the assessment measures mean?**

Both the state officials and those at SACSCOC expect that the measures used to assess student performance will be valid. Measurement validity, it must be recognized, is a topic on which there are a number of competing perspectives, all of which are unlikely to be satisfied within the contours of the current situation.

Generally, a valid measure is one that accurately captures the student’s performance on the outcome. Even this view is a simplification, however. For the purposes of the current implementation, SACSCOC requires that the assessments not be the product of a single instructor – it hopes to produce intersubjective validity by making the measurement the product of a group of faculty or some independent group. The state wants universities to establish the validity of the measurements they use by corroborating student performance on the measurements with other indicators of student performance. Here the aim appears to be reaching some form of predictive, concurrent or convergent validity involving correlations with items such as test scores, grades, national exams and the like. In addition, the BOG want external reviewers to review the measures during the required seven year program review (Quality Enhancement Review). Ostensibly, the reviewer would provide some assurance of content validity.
Will faculty, programs, departments, colleges or the university have to keep records on individual students majoring in our department?

There is no requirement that faculty, programs, department, colleges or the university will have to keep records on the individual outcomes for individual students majoring in each department. The assessments, by policy and guidelines, are tied to requirements for graduation. The satisfaction of graduation requirements is certified by the program to the registrar, who maintains the associated course records. If the satisfaction of graduation requirements occurs outside required courses, then the satisfaction of such requirements will have to be communicated to the Registrar as is now the case. Summary records about performance on the outcomes will be maintained in the institutional effectiveness portal.

Will program assessments be subject to audit, and if so, by whom?

State officials have not indicated whether they will audit program assessments in detail. Experience indicates that they will determine whether the university is generally in compliance. University Boards of Trustees must certify the university is in compliance and that graduates have completed baccalaureate programs with state mandated academic learning compacts. Program assessments will be reviewed within the program, by the college and, in a few instances, by the Office of Provost and Academic Affairs. They may also be considered by the Undergraduate Policy committee or other committees of the Faculty Senate.

How will the State Mandated Academic Learning Compacts be disseminated to students?

The State Mandated Academic Learning Compacts for each bachelor’s degree program will be made readily available to students electronically at the university Academic Guide site. The web site provides current and prospective students access to the requirements of the State Mandated Academic Learning Compacts.

The information posted on the web site includes outcome statements, what type of outcome they are, and a list of the assessment types you will use.
### Excerpts from Bloom’s Taxonomy of Measureable Verbs

[Further items can be found online]

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